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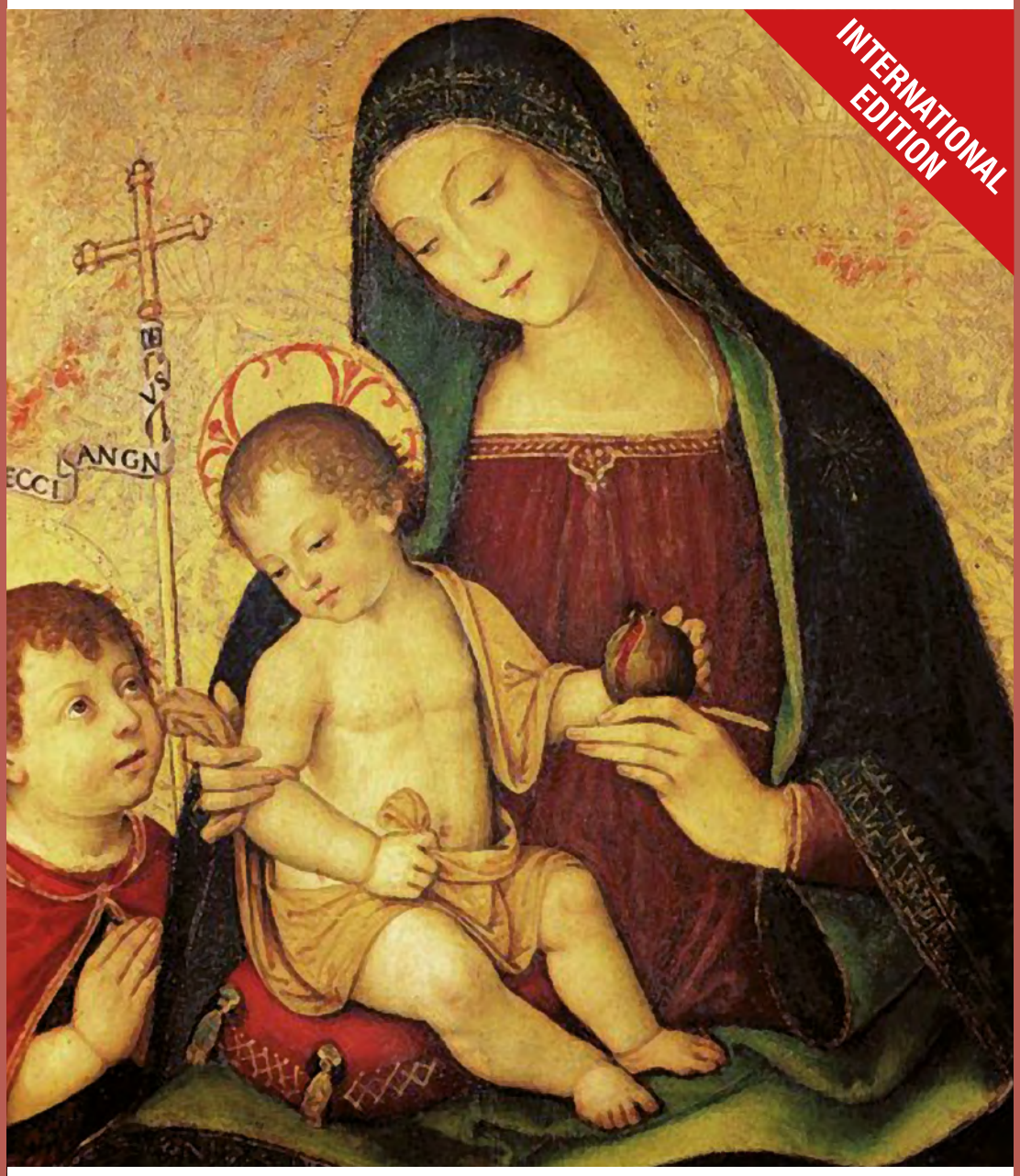
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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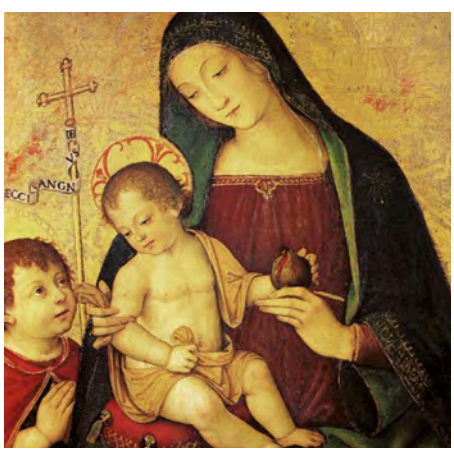


On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of the* Madonna of the Pomegranate *(ca. 1508-1509) by Pinturicchio, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena*

Focus of the President

Traditions • History

Cuisine • Products • Food Technology

A strong and cohesive Academy

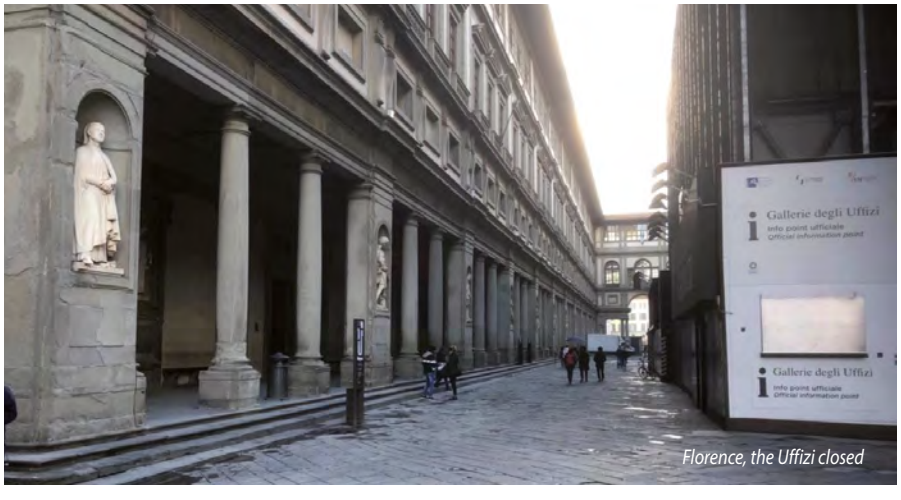
by Paolo Petroni
President of the Academy

A year full of worries, anxiety and questions draws to a close, but there is a glimmer of hope for rebirth.

We're in a red zone: highest risk, maximum lockdown. **The setting: a 200-metre stretch of road in the inner suburbs of an important Italian city**. Well-trafficked: not the shadow of a chance to find parking. On the corner there's a pizza slice eatery, open for carry-out and home delivery, doing a brisk trade. Next are a newsagent and tobacconist, a ladies' hairdresser, a real estate agency, a large sporting goods shop, a perfumery, a laundry, an apothecary, a café-bar, a deli, an optician, a splendid shop selling various creams and soaps, and an electrician. **All open, as per current regulations**. Let's cross the road. A macrobiotic shop, a florist, a shop specialising in coffee, a greengrocer's, a food shop, a bike mechanic, a barber's, a chemist's with annexed flotilla of semi-masked customers in front, a bank, and - there it is! A women's fashion shop, sternly and sadly shuttered. Completing the street's offerings are a baker and another café. All told, **24 open shops, except the wretched outcast selling clothes. This is not an imaginary street**, dreamt up for the purposes of this article. It is simple reality. Evidently the virus only threatens those who covet the new autumn-winter apparel and shoe collection.

The rules often appear arbitrary and leave us unsettled

However, jokes aside, **if anyone could explain the rationale behind such forms of discrimination**, which bring many fields of business to their knees, **we would be willing to accept these restrictions with more conviction**. We all know that, facing a fearsome foe, we must exercise caution and good sense; but these rules, which seem arbitrary and appear unsupported by any data, leave us unsettled. In particular, there has been a **dogged campaign** against the sector closest to our hearts: **that of restaurants and tourism** in general - an enormous network **representing 13% of our GDP**. Sanitised restaurants, restricted walking paths, masks, customer lists, distance between diners, 6- and then 4-person maximums per table, total maximum occupancy signs, closure at 6! Expenses, sacrifices, useless efforts, a sector in tatters. As we go to the press, there is talk of completely closing restaurants on Christmas and Boxing Day. And as if that weren't enough, as an additional gift they impose a curfew of 10 PM even for New Year's Eve. Again, the rationale eludes us. If the rules are in place and the numbers of diners are already limited, why go on a power trip with even more nonsensical impositions?



Florence, the Uffizi closed

Finding solutions to fight the disease while sparing the economy and socialisation

What is the link between these restrictions (let us also mention the ban on Midnight Mass) and reduced contagion? And this inflexible strategy of **lumping restaurants with bars, imposing one-size-fits-all closing times, is patently absurd**. These are two different worlds, with different clienteles and practices. Given that the virus appears in no hurry to die off while cures and vaccines seem a long way off, one would think it necessary to find solutions with some degree of rational basis, which would allow containment of the epidemic without pulverising a nation's economy and social habits. One may forget that Italy contains 8,000 municipalities, including minuscule ones (the smallest has a mere 34 inhabitants). How to justify forbidding travel between municipalities? How can we be denied basic freedoms such as visiting our loved ones, grandparents, partners, fiancés? **How long will the culture freeze last?** No museums, theatres, cinemas - no art? No school? No university? **If we don't find clear, logical, reliably empirical solutions, we will pay dearly**. It's pointless for authorities, gover-

nors and mayors to pass responsibilities back and forth like hot potatoes, or consider **deploying the army in our streets** (best avoided, considering the existence of over 300,000 law enforcement agents in addition to the Municipal Police forces). Soldiers in the streets **fully equipped for warfare**, with fatigues, flak jackets, assault rifles, quick-draw leg-holstered pistols and truncheons are more useful for patrolling the streets of Kabul than Milan. What's the point of fining a homeless person asleep in an arcade for being out after 10 PM? If they want to rake in the cash, I suggest visiting **the homeless encampment which gathers every evening under the porticoes in front of our Academy's headquarters**. Stimulus payments, handouts, payment deadline extensions of a few months or even days, or eviction or layoff postponements are merely palliative. How long are we planning to continue like this? A month? Two, three? And what next? Assuming we'll have to coexist with the virus for quite a while yet, we should figure out **a moderate solution which, based on solid information, draws a balance between health, safety, freedom, socialisation, the economy and culture**.

Good news: Restaurant Guides are being discussed again

The 66th edition of the **Michelin** Red Guide has been launched: via streaming, obviously, and following an anomalous year during which no serious restaurant assessments were possible. Judgements should therefore be presumably back-dated to 2019, hence the confirmation of all eleven 3-starred restaurants en masse. 2-starred restaurants also remain rather static, with three new entries: Davide Oldani of **D'O di Cornaredo** (Milan), Matteo Metullio of **Harry's Piccolo in Trieste** (founded by Arrigo Cipriani in the 1970s) and Rocco De Santis of **Santa Elisabetta in Florence** (only after retaining 1 star for a year). A record year for the Tuscan **Enrico Bartolini**: his new star for Poggio Rosso in Castelnuovo Berardenga gives him 9 Michelin stars overall, making him the world's fourth most-starred chef. Finally, 27 restaurants gained their first star, for a total of 323 restaurants.

Michelin is youth-oriented: 16 of the 27 newly starred chefs are under 35

The Guide's strong focus on youth is noteworthy: indeed, of the 27 newly minted stars, 16 went to chefs under 35 years of age. We must also note the permanent closure of Davide Scabin's **Combal.Zero in Rivoli** (Turin), de facto already closed since February. A new development since the previous edition is the "**green star**" intended to reward chefs' ecological commitment. It is not completely clear what this refers to, but it apparently tends to indicate the use of produce from home gardens, family growers, organic farmers and sustainable agriculture.

Italy's Gambero Rosso (Red Prawn) Guide has lost its numbered and graded assessments

The 31st edition of the ***Gambero Rosso Guide to Italy's Restaurants*** is now out, reviewing 2,650 venues. Considering the *annus horribilis*, numbered and 'graded' reviews are gone: no failing marks, therefore. Symbols - forks, prawns and bottles - remain, rating excellence from one to three. Four have won their third fork: Andrea Aprea, chef of **Vun** in the Park Hyatt Milan; Giuseppe Mancino of **Piccolo Principe** in the Grand Hotel Principe di Piemonte in

Viareggio; and the Romans **Glass Hostaria** by Cristina Bowerman and **Imago** in the Hotel Hassler, with Andrea Antonini.

Academicians feel part of one large family

These days, the Italian Academy of Cuisine is admirably responding to the adversities enumerated above. **Truly exceptional, and superior to those of previous years, are our foreign Delegations' and Legations' activities** marking the **V Week of Italian Cuisine in the World**. The many seminars, round tables and conferences likewise held in collaboration with our diplomatic network and Italian Cultural Institutes were well attended and greatly appreciated. In Italy too, many initiatives are being organised, aiming to encourage Academicians' lively participation in interesting events **connected with the upcoming Christmas holidays and local culture** more generally. **Above all, the clear and strong desire for togetherness is palpable, and there is a profound sense of belonging, of being Academicians**.

Knowing that there is a family of almost 8,000 people can be a comforting point of reference

In these difficult times, including psychologically, which inflict **social deprivation anxiety** on some, knowing that there is a Delegate, a group of people at work, from the Secretariat to the Editorial Office; knowing that each month one can read our magazine and stay informed through our newsletter; knowing that there is a family of almost 8,000 people and a Delegation full of friends, **can provide comfort and a reliable point of reference**, with the awareness that soon we will finally be able to meet again. In this hope, dearest Academician friends, I wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and the best of health.

Paolo Petroni

A sweet little miracle

by Elisabetta Cocito
Turin Academician

Zabaione: a delicious foamy cream, recognised as a PAT (Traditional Agri-food Product) for Piedmont since 2015.

Zabaione seems to have arisen from a felicitous combination of mathematics and faith. Indeed, the tradition closest to us, quoted in the Regulations of the Worshipful Association of Private Cooks of Turin in 1722, **attributes its invention to the Spanish friar Pasquale** (Paschal) **de Baylon**, later canonised, who **belonged to a Franciscan monastic community in Turin** in the 16th century. Having travelled through half of Europe and frequented its courts, he was reputed an excellent cook, who bestowed not only blessings but also recipes upon his penitents. Among these was the recipe for an invigorating egg cream: ***zabaione*, purportedly able to revitalise even the 'sleepiest' husbands**. A perfect *zabaione* required the proportions 1+2+2+1: 1 egg yolk, 2 teaspoons of sugar, 2 eggshells of Marsala and 1 of water. The cream's success, due to its marvellous flavour and aphrodisiacal properties, caused its recipe to be passed from mother to daughter, then transcend the Savoy kingdom's borders and spread worldwide.

In this tradition, the dialectal term *sambajon* derives from the name of the canonised monk, *San* ('saint') *Baylon*. We should also recall that **the saint was named patron of cooks and pastry makers in the 19th century**; every 17th of May, the Cooks' Association of Turin celebrates his feast day at the Church of St Thomas where he served. In the interests of precision, I should point out that before Italian Unification in 1861, *zabaione* and other alcoholic desserts contained Malaga or Madeira imported from the Iberian Peninsula rather than Marsala which was then little-known in Piedmont.

A second legend attributes the paternity of *zabaione* to a 16th-century mercenary captain, Giovan Paolo Baglioni, nicknamed Zvàn Bajòun. Finding himself short of rations when encamped at the gates of Reggio Emilia, he sent some soldiers to pillage the surrounding lands as was the custom at the time, and they returned with what they found, namely eggs, sugar and a few flasks of wine. The captain, in lieu of anything better, mixed all these ingredients and gave the soldiers the resulting concoction: a resounding success which was named *zambajoun* after him. Finally, **another theory** claims that *zabaione* **originated in Venice**, where in the 17th century there was an abundance of a drink named *zabaja*, from the Illyrian coast, flavoured with Cypriot wine.

A cream similar to zabaione was probably known in more remote times

It is probable, however, that these origin stories are at least partially legendary, and that, considering the easy availabi-

lity of its ingredients, a similar cream was known and widespread in far remoter times: in 1533, for instance, a sweet similar to *zabaione* was served **chilled at the court of Catherine de' Medici, and an even older origin is highly likely**. The best-known recipe seems attributable to **Bartolomeo Stefani**, cook to the Gonzagas in Mantua in the 17th century, who **also suggested adding cinnamon**, without, however, toasting it too much during preparation: "Beat it all together, and then take a commensurately sized earthenware dish, place two ounces of butter to melt therein, and when it is melted, pour in the mixture, and apply fire above and below". One can add ground cinnamon, "a quarter", without "overly toasting it".

The *zambaglione* recipe is also clearly described in the *Opera dell'arte del cucinare* (*The Art of Cooking*) by **Bartolomeo Scappi**, a six-volume work published in Venice in 1570; it suggests Malvasia or Trebbiano wine from Pistoia. The recipe is in the sixth volume, containing remedies for the infirm and convalescents, implying that *zabaione* may have a rural origin as a fortifying nourishment for children or fragile constitutions.

An even older recipe is in the late fifteenth-century cookbook known as MS B.19, most probably assembled by **an anonymous Neapolitan cook** and bequeathed by Dr Curt Bühler to the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Similar to *zabaione* is eggnog, a seasonal Christmas drink in English-speaking areas, attributed by some to the 18th-century London bartender Carl Joannessons, who combined egg yolks, sugar, whipped cream and milk, flavouring the concoction with cinnamon, vanilla and nutmeg, thereby creating an invigorating beverage to ward off the bitter winter cold. ***Zabaione* is greatly appreciated in the Anglophone world**, and is often quoted even in the most authoritative dailies. A droll description appears in the British *Guardian*, warning against consuming *zabaione* before driving: "it's very potent!" The *Los Angeles Times* suggests enjoying it cold in the morning or as a dessert, but only after having sent the children to bed. Our sainted Friar Baylon may not have imagined its danger to future generations...

Zabaione is an elegant and versatile ingredient in other sweets

As well as being delicious alone, *zabaione* is also an elegant and versatile ingredient in other sweets. For example, **Vialardi**, a cook at the Savoy court (1854), **used it as a filling for a sponge cake** (then known as *pasta genoise*) then covered in *gianduja* chocolate-hazelnut cream. In 1846 the cook **Chapusot** created the French-inspired **Empress rice pudding**: rice cooked in milk and mixed with a generous dose of *zabaione* and whipped cream. An intriguing ***zaballione della quaresima*** (Lenten *zabaione*) is described by an 18th-century Piedmontese cook whose manuscript is kept in the State Archives in Turin: pine nuts, Moscato wine, starch and sugar were whisked together and coloured with saffron, creating a delicious pudding similar to a real *zabaione*.

In the present day, this soft cream is **a perfect accompaniment for a slice of artisanal *panettone***. Legendary is the zabaione of the famous Café Al Bicerin in Turin, founded in 1763 and mentioned by Umberto Eco in *The Prague Cemetery*: it is offered **in its classic form with Marsala, or flavoured with Moscato, lemon, *passito di Caluso* dessert wine or black cherry Ratafià**. *Zabaione* also begat VOV, an egg cream liqueur from Padua, created in 1845 by the confectioner Gian Battista Pezziol using yolks left over from making *torrone* nougat, apparently named after *vovi*, meaning 'eggs' in dialect. It simple recipe can even be followed at home. Another classic is the "home-made *zabaione* liqueur" (from 1935, well into the Fascist era) published by the acclaimed food columnist "Petronilla" (pseudonym of the physician Amalia Moretti Foggia Della Rovere).

I conclude by noting an original and **refined savoury *zabaione* recipe**, using yolks, a pinch of salt, butter and white wine, which **perfectly complements a plate of steamed asparagus**. The great Scappi included it in his cookbook, with yolks, muscatel wine, butter and chicken stock - showing that excellent cooks' recipes never go out of style.

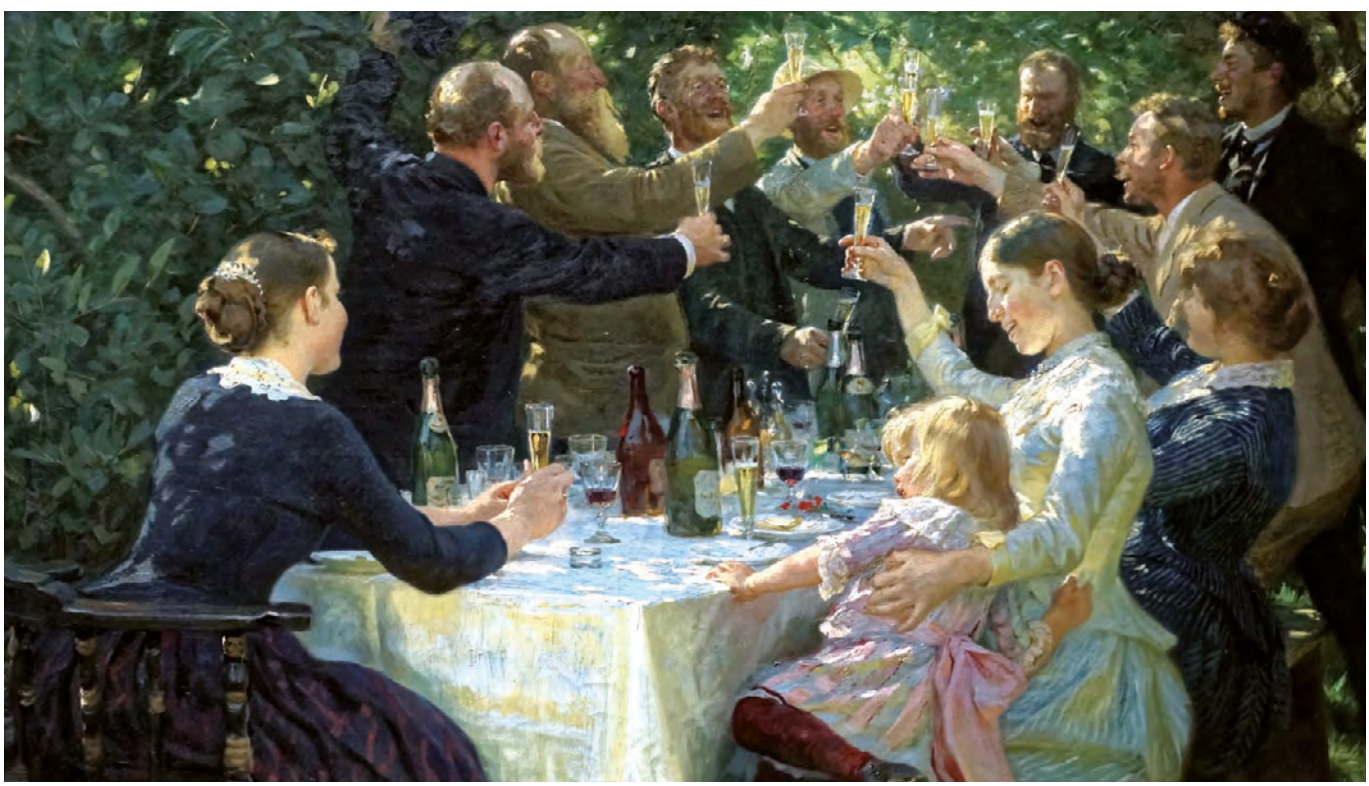
Elisabetta Cocito

History of the toast

by Gianni Di Giacomo
Pescara Academician

A journey through legend, reportage, poetry and music.

History's most profoundly significant toast is **assuredly that of the Eucharist, when towards the end of the Last Supper Jesus took his chalice**, gave thanks, handed it to his disciples and said: "Drink ye all of it". However, the history of the toast is many centuries older. Indeed, bas-reliefs, frescoes and cuneiform clay tablets tell of the banquets including toasts by Sumerian monarchs (4th millennium B.C.) and Akkadian princes and their consorts raising their chalices to the gods (3rd millennium B.C.), as did the Egyptian Pharaohs and their wives beginning around 3000 B.C.
The toast must surely have arisen with and for wine. In the Old Testament, wine (mentioned 224 times in the Bible) is considered the symbol of all God's gifts, able to **give comfort and joy and alleviate human suffering**. A legend narrates that the forbidden fruit of the earthly paradise which marked us with original sin was the succulent grape, not the wholesome apple. The Old Testament credits Noah with discovering winemaking. According to rabbinic literature, while planting the first vineyard, he accepted help from Satan, who fertilised the soil with blood from a lamb, saying, "Whoever drinks in moderation shall be as meek as a lamb". He then likewise used the blood of a lion, saying, "Whoever drinks slightly more than ne-



Peder Severin Krøyer, Hip, Hip, Hurrah! Artists' gathering at Skagen (1888), Gothenburg Museum of Art (Sweden)

"Vestibule of Polyphemus", Villa romana del Casale (Sicily)

cessary will be as courageous as a lion"; and finally, using the blood of a hog, he said "Whoever drinks to excess will be as a swine wallowing in the mire". **Archaeological finds date the earliest winemaking experiments to the Neolithic** (8000 B.C.) and trace the origins of grape cultivation and winemaking to present-day Georgia and Armenia, near Mount Ararat where the Bible says that Noah's ark ran aground.

Toasts began with humans thanking the gods for their gift of wine

Though until the first millennium B.C. the toast was only humanity's way of thanking the gods for the gift of wine, **from the 8th and 7th centuries BC toasts were also addressed to friends or important personages**. This gesture, named *philotesia* (*φιλοτησία*), was the 'loving cup': raising the cup in honour of a friend, invoking their name, sipping wine and then passing the cup to the friend to drink from and keep as a token of friendship. The Romans instead went from drinking according to Greek customs (*bibere graeco more*) to *propinatio*, 'to pledge' (from the Greek *προπίνω*, literally 'to drink before').

The organised toast surely originated with symposia from the 1st millennium B.C. The term *sympòsion* (*συμπόσιον*) derives from *syn* + *pìnein*, 'drink together', indicating a gathering between friends, characterised by wine-drinking after the evening meal. Symposia began with **electing a symposiarch** (the 'sovereign' of the evening) who must be a brilliant moderator able to steer conversations in the right directions, avoiding discord and promoting friendship. The most important responsibility was **deciding the proportions of water to wine and the number of cups that each participant should quaff**. Tiny cups and a limited number of toasts were other means of harm reduction. Even priests dilute wine with water during mass, because in that moment they hold the role of symposiarch, overseeing the celebratory toast of the Eucharistic symposium.

After the stern republican age when wine was chiefly employed for libations to the gods, the Romans accorded greater importance to wine consumption. Symposia became more dissolute and toasts honouring eminent personages would be made by lifting as many cups as the letters of their name.

The Italian term 'brindisi' originated between the 16th and 17th centuries

The term 'toast' apparently derives from a literal piece of toast, or 'sop', often spiced or seasoned, placed in an alcoholic drink to flavour it and absorb the dregs (while using up stale bread), as in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Instead, the Italian word '*brindisi*', originating between the 16th and 17th centuries, **derives from the archaic German *bring dir's* meaning 'I offer you this'**, then transformed (via German mercenaries) into ***brindis* through Spanish**. In the 19th century, **the practice of accompanying a toast with 'chin chin'**, from the Chinese *qing* (請; 'please', 'invite'), arrived through British sailors. **There are various theories regarding the clinking of glasses**. Among the most cited is the fear of poisoning: initially people switched glasses to demonstrate good faith, but since doubt remained because the glasses might have been switched once beforehand, vessels (then metallic) were struck together so each would spill some of its contents into the other. Another theory states that clinking glasses 'pleases' the ears. Indeed, with touch we feel the glass in our hands, with sight we appreciate the drink's colour, with smell we enjoy its fragrance, with taste we savour its flavour, and finally with hearing we perceive the clinking, making the sensory experience complete. Some claim that the clinking was intended to frighten away evil spirits, like the champagne cork's pop and New Year fireworks.

Toasts in classical music

Opera makes an important contribution to the history of toasts. **Toasts are present in many operas**, and although authors, plots, characters and actors change, wine remains the star of the show. **Mozart** uses wine as a clever means for his character Don Giovanni (1787) to lure maidens, thereby populating his 'roster' of amorous victims. In *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782) the protagonist gets the pasha's guard inebriated with wine to rescue his beloved. **Gioachino Rossini** depicts toasts in various operas, including *La Gazza Ladra* (1817), in the fragment "Tocchiamo, beviamo". **Donizetti** portrays an intense toast in *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833): "Il segreto per esser felici". **Verdi** includes a toast in *Macbeth* (1847) with "Si colmi il calice di vino eletto"; toasting reaches its peak in the opening scene of *La Traviata* (1853) with "Libiamo ne' lieti calici". An older Verdi uses a toast in *Otello* (1887) to fire up spirits with "Innaffia l'ugola". *Cavalleria Rusticana* by **Mascagni** (1890) contains an engaging toast: "Viva il vino spumeggiante".

Gianni Di Giacomo

The pomegranate: a treasure *chest of natural health benefits*

by Morello Pecchioli
Honorary Academician for Verona

Its ruby-red seeds represent vital energy.

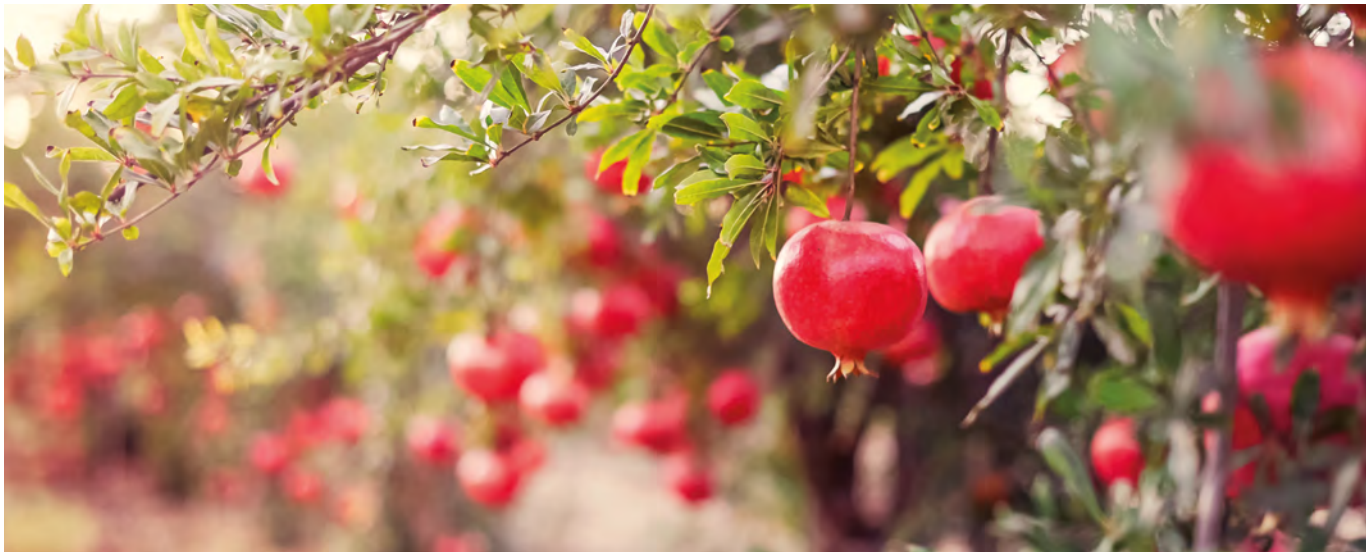
Its queenly character is clear from the crown - the vestige of the floral calyx - worn with regal insouciance on its B-side. That six-pointed diadem, and the abundance of arils (the **seeds, over 600) concealed in its shell like rubies in a treasure chest, have imbued the pomegranate with more symbolic significance than any other fruit**.

For the Jews, pomegranates represent righteousness: a fruit worthy of comparison with the mystical bride in the Song of Songs, in which it figures multiple times. "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair... Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely; thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks". In the eighth chapter, virtue verges on eroticism: "I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate". Symbolising adherence to the Torah (its 613 seeds corresponding to the 613 *mitzvot* or commandments), **the pomegranate was embroidered on the ritual vestments of the high priests and sculpted into the capitals of Solomon's temple**.

This delicious and precious food symbolises fertility and abundance

Delicious and precious as food, the pomegranate has been a metaphor since time immemorial. This health-giving fruit symbolised fertility, abundance and regeneration for the Egyptians, Phoenicians and Mesopotamians. The Greeks raised it to Olympus by placing it in the hand of Hera, powerful queen of the gods and patron of marriage (woe betide the unfaithful Zeus!), blessing marital unions. So did the Romans with Juno: same goddess, same fruit, same protection. **Daughters of the Eternal City got married wearing pomegranate flower coronets**, an auspicious sign of prosperity. A pomegranate seed fraudulently fed to Persephone/Proserpina tied the daughter of Demeter/Ceres to Hades/Pluto, in whose underworld she must spend half the year. For Christians, as for Jews, this fruit decorates priestly vestments and, among the acanthus leaves, the Corinthian capitals of church columns. **The pomegranate also symbolises the Virgin Mary, invoking her beauty and numerous virtues**: every seed corresponds to one of them - a litany from nature.

In art, the red-juiced pomegranate represents the martyrs' blood. In Re-



naissance painting and sculpture, when depicted in the hand of the Baby Jesus in his mother's arms, it alludes to his passion and future resurrection. We find it in the work of **Jacopo della Quercia, Filippino Lippi and Leonardo da Vinci** and in two splendid paintings by **Sandro Botticelli**: the *Madonna of the Magnificat* and the *Madonna of the pomegranate*.
Across different faiths, **the strong symbolism of the plant and fruit remains**. The Qur'an teaches Muslims that the pomegranate grows in paradise and is one of the fairest things created by Allah. "Eat pomegranate", Mohammed recommended: "it will keep you far from envy and hatred". An Arab legend recounts how Mohammad's daughter Fatima shed tears which were transformed into pomegranate seeds when learning of the deaths of her sons Hassan and Hussain. Even Freemasonry has incorporated this fruit into its imagery: its adepts consider it a symbol of fertility and universal brotherly union.

A comely fruit which has inspired writers and poets

All in all, a beautiful fruit with an equally beautiful history behind it and just as much literature. **Giosuè Carducci** speaks of a pomegranate tree when lamenting the death of his infant son: "The tree towards which you once stretched your tiny hand, the green pomegranate tree, now sprouts beautiful red flowers...". **Grazia Deledda** makes it the casus belli in a dramatic struggle between youngsters in her short story "The Pomegranate". The fruit inspired the sensual **Gabriele D'Annunzio** who began his *Novels of the Pomegranate* during his passionate affair with Eleonora Duse: "The pomegranate fruit, bursting with ripeness, would suddenly crack open like a beautiful mouth forced into a cordial smile...". And **Arturo Graf** vied with that passionate Bard for sheer lust: "the blood-red flowers among green fronds - lips, they seemed, inflamed with desire...". The eleventh-century Persian poet **Abu'l-Hassan Ali Farrokhi Sistani** wrote, more delicately: "Autumn, that golden temple where infant idols dwell/ and the pomegranate, in full voice, shamelessly sings out the secrets of love".

Cuisine in the Veneto region has many recipes including the "pomo granato"

Punica granatum - the scientific designation of pomegranate - is highly decorative in vegetable plots and gardens, both in spring when it is a riot of red flowers, and in autumn for its beautiful fruits. **Foodwise, the pomegranate is used for making thirst-quenching juices and other drinks, cocktails, syrups and preserves**. Its seeds are used for **enriching salads, garnishing dishes** and, transformed into sauce, **complementing meat and fish**. Great chefs make much use of it.
The Veneto region has many recipes including the "*pomo granato*" (in dialect, 'grained apple') which recall the pomp of the Most Serene Venetian Republic. **Nino Baggio**, cook and owner-operator of the celebrated Locanda Baggio in Asolo, **embroiders an entire menu** with pomegranate, of which he has four trees in his garden: "It's a marvellous fruit. We use its seeds for making sorbets, cheesecakes and other sweets, and to season radicchio from Treviso. **It admirably complements meats**. I make a pomegranate sauce to use on duck, venison and game". **Mida Muzzolon**, chef at the Tenuta San Martino in Legnago, prepares a dish combining the lagoon and the Adriatic with points inland: "**It is a dill-flavoured semolina dumpling with scallops, prawns and pomegranate juice**. Since the fruit symbolises marriage, I successfully offer it at wedding feasts too". The late, lamented Veronese cook, poet and sculptor **Giorgio Gioco** adorned the tables of his restaurant, 12 Apostoli, with **polished bronze pomegranates that he sculpted using black wax** and then had cast using the lost-wax process in the Brustolin artworks foundry. "The pomegranate" - he said - "is supremely beautiful. It has the skin of a Creole maiden. As well as in food, I would arrange it on tables as a symbol of good luck and friendship. And it's also healthy. I met an Air Force general who ordered his subordinates to drink grenadine each morning instead of coffee, to keep them healthy".
The *malum granatum* ('grained apple'), as the ancient Romans called it, is indeed a treasure chest of natural health benefits. **It contains abundant vitamin C, potassium and anti-oxidants** which protect the heart and arteries by attacking free radicals. Medical research confirms that it slows the developments of atherosclerosis and some tumours. **Its antibacterial properties are particularly important for the mouth**, as it prevents cavities. It is an astringent, and, **according to a Japanese study, fights depression** and alleviates menopausal symptoms.
Let us close with a legend assuring us that hidden treasures can be found by dowsing with a pomegranate-wood rod. Because, in life, we should never say never, those with a gift for divination and access to a pomegranate rod could always try hunting for treasure.

Morello Pecchioli